



BARK'S GUIDE TO GROUND-TRUTHING TIMBER SALES

Introduction

One approach to protecting our federally managed public lands is called "Forest Watch." This involves monitoring individual timber sales to stop them before they are logged. An important component of Forest Watch is Ground-truthing. Ground-truthing is the process of visiting a proposed timber sale and walking it to see if the agency (the US Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management) is following the law.

Ground-truthing involves looking for characteristics in and around the proposed sale area such as old growth forest, wildlife habitat, and streams. It entails reporting inconsistencies between what the agency claims in their documents and what you actually find in the field.

Don't worry if you have no experience doing this sort of thing; all you need is an inquisitive mind, an ability to observe and take notes, and an interest in and love for the forest.

Why Ground-Truth?

We have read and ground-truthed many Forest Service and BLM timber sale plans. When we ground-truth, we always find information that is not included in the sale plan or that is inconsistent with the sale plan. Also, the timber sale plans are always written from the point of view of an agency that has already decided it wants to log that area. Therefore, the descriptions of the sale area will read as if there is an urgent need to log. Ground-truthing will show you the true characteristics of the area. Ground-truthing is also a motivating and inspiring way to visit the forest you are working to protect.

Here is an example of the type of information you can gather only by ground-truthing: On a recent sale, the Forest Service stated there would be no new road construction but that they would "reconstruct" some existing roads. But when we ground-truthed the sale area, we found that it had been so long since the roads had been used that they had grown over with trees and shrubs. So what the Forest Service was really proposing was to, in effect, build new roads.

Also, a big part of ground-truthing is being a witness to the destructive practices of the Forest Service and BLM. We need to let them know they are being watched closely.

Finding Out About Timber Sales

1. Get out in the forest. If you see any boundary markers, note the name of the sale on the markers and call Bark, your local environmental group or the Forest Service or BLM district office to find out the status of the sale. Once you know the name of the sale and the district it is in, send a letter to or email the ranger district requesting to be placed on the mailing list for that sale.
2. Get on the mailing lists for all timber sales. Both the National Forests and the BLM Districts release regular updates. In Mt. Hood National Forest, the update is called "Sprouts." These periodic updates list all upcoming timber sales in the National Forest or BLM District. For National Forests, contact the Supervisor's Office to get on the quarterly update mailing list. To get even more specific information, contact the ranger districts and ask to be placed on the timber sale notice mailing lists. For BLM sales, contact the district office.
3. Avoid mailing list hurdles by joining the Bark email alert list. We will send you notices of upcoming sales on Mt. Hood National Forest and nearby BLM land, with brief summaries and suggested comments.

So You've Identified A Sale You Want To Monitor - What Next?

1. Call the ranger district and ask for the best maps of the sale that they have. Early on in the process they might only have very general maps that don't even tell you which areas will be planned for logging. However, you can still get to know the general area so that when you do get specific maps you will already be familiar with the area's characteristics. Often, the characteristics near the sale area are just as important as the characteristics within the sale area. For example, let's say you learn from ground-truthing that the surrounding area has been totally clearcut; you would then know there is no nearby area for old-growth dependent species to migrate to in order to survive. If possible, get the sale unit maps. The unit maps will show you all the details you need for ground-truthing: the units that are planned for logging, roads and often riparian areas.
2. Get out as soon as possible - the earlier the better. And get out in all the seasons. Different characteristics will catch your attention at different times of year.
3. Start with a general view of the area to help you determine which units to focus on. Start by studying every map of the area you can get your hands on, then spend a day driving, biking or hiking the sale area (biking works particularly well at this stage).
4. Rarely will you be able to walk every unit, so you must prioritize - focus on units that might have characteristics that are seriously incompatible with logging: riparian areas (water), old-growth, steep or unstable slopes and trails.
5. Document what you see. Take good notes, photographs, and video. Use the Bark Survey Sheet.

What To Look For In The Timber Sale Area

1. **Use the Bark Survey Sheet.** Our goal is to have a survey sheet filled out on every unit of every sale.
2. **General Characteristics:** Look for and note by unit number as many of the following characteristics as possible. Don't worry if you can't get everything listed below, just get as much as you can.
 - Types, ages and sizes of trees - include overstory and understory trees. Measure approximate d.b.h. (diameter at breast height).
 - Amount, size and age of downed trees.
 - Amount, size and age of snags.
 - Any distinctive vegetation. Even if you can't identify something, note its existence - for example, "lots of mushrooms" as opposed to "lots of *Ramaria stunzii*."
 - Elevation.
 - Slope.
 - Aspect - which direction the slope is facing.
 - Signs of past tree cutting and regrowth within cut areas.
 - Blowdown and potential for blowdown - especially prevalent along edges of clearcuts.
 - Signs of fire.
 - Roads in the area, and their condition and use. Are they gated or otherwise closed? Are they being used even though closed?
 - Signs of landslides.
 - Wildlife, wildlife habitat and animal prints.
 - Soil conditions - dry, wet, rocky, etc.
 - Recreation resources - trails, campgrounds, etc.
3. **Riparian Areas:** These are streams, lakes and wet areas - anywhere there is water.
 - Identify them in advance on the maps, or look for signs such as devil's claw, skunk cabbage and cedars.
 - Mark them on your unit map.

- If the sale area is already marked, measure from the sale boundary to the riparian area - see the buffer widths listed below.
- Look for fish or suitable fish habitat.
- Note the condition of streams - flow, clarity, sedimentation, pools and temperature.
- Note whether streams flow year-round or dry up in summer.

4. **Riparian Buffers:** These areas alongside bodies of water are no-cut or limited-cut areas under the Northwest Forest Plan.

- Fish-bearing streams, lakes and natural ponds - the greater of 300 feet or the length of two site-potential trees (look for the biggest trees in the area and double their height), on each side of the stream, lake or pond.
- Permanent non-fishbearing streams and wetlands greater than 1 acre - the greater of 150 feet or one site-potential tree, on each side.
- Intermittent streams - the greater of 100 feet or one site-potential tree, on each side.
- Wetlands less than one acre - at least to the outer edges of the riparian vegetation.
- Unstable and potentially unstable areas - the extent of unstable and potentially unstable areas.
- Note that these riparian buffers can be increased or decreased after a watershed analysis is completed, so you should check in the watershed analysis for final buffer widths.

5. **The Sale Markings:**

- Units always have boundary markers, plus markers within the units.
- Boundary markers always face into the unit, and usually state the name of the sale and the unit number. On Mt. Hood National Forest, they are usually blue. There are also usually blue flags and fluorescent orange markers on boundary trees.
- Individual trees within the units will also be marked with orange or blue paint. On some sales, the leave trees are marked, meaning the marked trees will not be cut. On other sales, the trees to be cut are marked. You can usually figure this out on your own if you have a copy of the Environmental Assessment or the timber sale Prospectus. Otherwise, you will have to call the Forest Service or BLM timber sale planner.
- Other markings can include riparian areas, future roads, and sensitive plants. Sometimes it is clear what the flags are for, while sometimes it is a mystery.

6. **Keep in mind**, the most important reason to ground-truth is to gain firsthand knowledge of the sale area. Any knowledge you gain of the sale area will help you make an impact.

7. **However, if you really want to thoroughly ground-truth timber sales, you must be willing to delve into all the paperwork associated with the sales.**

Document / Map / Equipment List

1. Maps:

- local National Forest map - available at outdoor stores, the local National Forest office, or the Forest Service map store at 800 NE Oregon, Portland, OR (503) 731-4444. Mt. Hood has also just released new district maps which are very good, also available at this map store.
- Northwest Forest Plan land designation map (showing Late-Successional Reserves, matrix, key watersheds, etc.) and the Mt. Hood Land and Resource Management Plan land designation map - from the Pacific Northwest Region Office or your local National Forest Supervisor's Office. Bark has copies you can review at the Bark office.
- USGS topo maps - from your local outdoor store or the Forest Service map store, or ask Bark for a TOPO CD printout.
- Specific timber sale maps, as discussed above - from the Forest Service or BLM District Office.

2. Field Guides - any and all you can buy, borrow and carry - all available at Powell's:

- Tree and Plant guides - Preferably Northwest specific. The key book is Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast: Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, and Alaska, by Jim Pojar et al. Another useful one is Rare and Endangered Plants of Oregon, by Donald Eastman.
- Mushroom guides - the large volume of the Audubon Society Field Guide to Mushrooms of N. America is a good start, but Mushrooms Demystified is better.
- Wildlife guide - ones showing prints are most useful.
- Bird guide.

3. Equipment:

- Camera
- Video camera
- Binoculars
- Mountain bike
- Pen and paper
- Tape measure - if you buy one, get a 150 ft. tape
- Flagging tape
- Compass and/or GPS

4. A copy of the Record of Decision (ROD) / Standards and Guidelines, for the Northwest Forest Plan, April 1994 - from the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region Office, 333 SW 1st, Portland, OR 97204, or your local National Forest Supervisor's or BLM District Office.

5. A copy of the Land and Resource Management Plan for you local National Forest or BLM District - from your local National Forest Supervisor's or BLM District Office.

6. You must be comfortable with bushwhacking. Ground-truthing is definitely an off-trail adventure. If you are not experienced at off-trail hiking, map reading and route finding, be careful when you first start out. If you start by looking at sales that are already marked, you can always walk the boundaries of sales, thereby walking in complete circles. Also, be aware of hunting season and dress appropriately.

What To Do With The Information You Gather

1. Include your personal knowledge of the area in any contact or correspondence with the Forest Service or BLM. Even if all the formal public participation NEPA phases are completed, information should be passed along to the Forest Service or BLM.

2. Share the information with groups like Bark. We can use it in appeals, lawsuits, press releases, etc.

3. Share the information with friends, family, acquaintances, politicians and the media. Part of the process of ground-truthing is to expose as many people as possible to what is happening in our public forests.

Phases Of Public Participation In Forest Service Timber Sales – The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Phase 1 - Scoping. This is a general call for comments on a proposed timber sale area. The plans are often very vague at this stage - for example, unit maps will not be produced yet, there will only be general maps of the sale area with no units marked. At this stage, the agencies are looking for information about unique or special characteristics of the planning area, rather than responses to their plan. However, we suggest including any comments that strike your fancy.

Phase 2 - Comments. Eventually (sometimes over a year later) the agency will produce an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). These are formal documents required by law that lay out the entire timber sale plan and the effects the agency expects from the logging. An EIS is a more detailed version of an EA. At this point, you have either 30 days (for an EA) or 45 days (for an EIS) to comment. Your comments must be received within this time period. Comments at this stage should be specific about the logging plans of the agency. Any personal knowledge you have

of the area will help immensely. Unit maps will be in the EA or EIS, and they are often available well before the EA or EIS is released.

Phase 3 - Appeal. If the Forest Service decides to go ahead with the sale despite your well-written comments, you can appeal that decision. Appeals must be made within 45 days of the formal decision to go ahead with the sale. You can only appeal, however, if you commented on the sale at some earlier stage. BLM appeals are more complicated, with very tight deadlines. The appeal is a fairly formal document. Appeals are made to the agency themselves, so in effect you have one person in an agency deciding if another person in the same agency screwed up. Appeals are tough to win. If you get to this stage, contact Bark or another environmental group to get a copy of one of our appeals to use as a template.

Phase 4 - Lawsuit. The next step is the lawsuit. Keep in mind that if you ever want to sue, courts will require that you went through the earlier stage of appealing, and you will probably be able to only sue on issues you raised in appeals.

After The Public Participation Stage

1. Before the sale is auctioned, the agency will produce a "Prospectus" on the sale. The prospectus will provide specific information on the sale to logging companies that may want to bid on the sale. It is good to get a copy of this prospectus. You can get on the prospectus mailing list by calling the Supervisor's Office and/or the ranger district. The prospectus will contain the final version of the sale. Often, there will be a fairly dramatic change since the EA or EIS was produced. Any significant changes should be brought to our attention. The maps and volume calculations will be the most accurate available.
2. A note about name changes. The Forest Service likes to change names between the EA/EIS and the actual sale offered to logging companies. This can make the sales hard to track. For instance, the well-known Eagle sale comes from the Eagle EIS. However, the Eagle EIS was actually divided into four sales: Eagle, Beagle, Talon and Claw. To track what started out as the Eagle EIS area, you would need to get the prospectuses on all four sales.
3. If the logging actually starts, there is still ground-truthing to do. Go out to the sale while tree cutting is actually in progress, but go on a weekend when the logging company will likely not be at work. Walk around and confirm that the logging company is taking only the trees they were supposed to take and that they are not encroaching on any buffers. If you can't get out to the sale while they are logging, go as soon as possible after they stop.
4. Look at the stumps. If the sale was marked for leave trees (meaning trees to be cut were not marked), look for paint at the base of the stumps. If there is any, the trees were likely cut illegally. If the sale was marked for take trees (trees to be cut were marked), all the stumps should have a dot of paint at the base. If they don't, they were likely cut illegally. Also, boundary trees should not be cut.
5. Bring the EA with you and compare what they said they were going to do with what they actually did. If the two are vastly different, inform the world.
6. If you find anything amiss, take photos and/or video. You must be able to document the trees that were illegally cut. Note their exact location. If just a few trees are illegally cut, call Forest Service law enforcement. We have received surprisingly good response in the past. If you find a gross violation, find an environmental group to file a lawsuit against the logging company.
7. Visit the sale area again, well after the logging is complete. Check to see if road closures and other follow-up projects were actually completed.

Keep In Contact

If you have questions, contact Bark or your local environmental group. Also, send copies of your letters to Bark or your local environmental group.

Keep us informed on how and what you are doing. We are here to help, advise and organize, but we believe at Bark that a network of individual activists confronting the Forest Service and BLM is highly effective.

Phone / Contact List & Hierarchy

Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region Office (Region 6)

333 SW 1st Ave.
PO Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208
(503) 808-2165

Mt. Hood National Forest Supervisor's Office

16400 Champion Way
Sandy, OR 97055
(503) 668-1700

Barlow Ranger District Office, Mt. Hood National Forest

PO Box 67
Dufur, OR 97021
(541) 467-2291

Clackamas Ranger District Office, Mt. Hood National Forest

595 NW Industrial Way
Estacada, OR 97023
(503) 630-6861

Hood River Ranger District Office, Mt. Hood National Forest

6780 Highway 35
Mt. Hood / Parkdale, OR 97041
(541) 352-6002

Zigzag Ranger District Office, Mt. Hood National Forest

70220 E. Hwy. 26
Zigzag, OR 97049
(503) 622-3191

Salem District Office, BLM

1717 Fabry Rd. SE
Salem, OR 97306
(503) 375-5646

Questions or comments, contact Bark at:

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(503) 331-0374
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Please feel free to copy and distribute this ground-truthing guide!